IZEMBEK NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE LAND EXCHANGE

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

March 11, 2010

At 1:07 p.m.

US Department of the Interior

1849 C Street, NW

Washington, DC
UNIDENTIFIED: Good afternoon, and welcome to the historic Sydney R. Yates Auditorium. Prior to the start of this event there are two important announcements. First, in the event of an emergency, please listen for instruction and proceed in orderly fashion to the nearest exit. The primary exit is through the rear of the auditorium and out the C Street entrance. Alternate routes are through the exit doors to the right and to the left of the auditorium stage. Staff will be observing to offer assistance to persons with special needs. Second, as a courtesy to others, please silence all cell phones and Blackberries. Thank you.

MS. CLOUGH: Good afternoon. I'm Helen Clough with the Fish and Wildlife Service, and I would like to welcome you to this Izembek National Wildlife Refuge public meeting on the Environmental Impact Statement for the proposed land exchange. I will just give a quick overview of how we're going to operate, and then I'll turn the meeting over to others. My job, while I do work for Fish and Wildlife Service, my job here
today is to facilitate the meeting, and that's my only role for this purpose. As we said, the purpose of this meeting is a public scoping meeting to gather comments on the scope and the topics that people would like to see us cover in this Environmental Impact Statement.

The agenda will consist of Refuge staff and the project manager, giving you a Power Point presentation and telling you a little bit about the project and the Refuge. Then we will have a panel that will consist of those folks and a couple of other people to answer questions, if you have questions about the project. If they sound like rhetorical questions or people begin making comments I will cut you off, because that will be followed by a comment period.

And if we don't get a lot more people to sign up, I was going to give everybody three minutes but I will give you four minutes, and then we're here until four o'clock, and so after everyone who has signed up has made their comments, if there is time remaining and you want to provide additional comments for the record we do have a court reporter. We are recording the entire proceeding, and we'll be able to do that.
Also, we will be happy to meet informally with people. At the back we have some of the maps and photos that show the project area, you know, if people want to engage in more detailed questions. There are also a number of ways to comment in addition to speaking at this meeting. You can provide written comments. Stephanie will go over our website. We even have a comment form if people want to just scribble out a few comments here.

If you do wish to speak please sign in at the table at the back, and with the exception of one person, who is Alaska's Congressman Don Young, who I will defer to, people will be called on in the order in which they signed in. If you change your mind and decide you don't want to comment, that's fine too. We'll do that. I will have a person up here timing you and I will run through the procedures again when we begin. I am going to turn it over right now to Todd Logan, the Chief of the Refuge System in Alaska, to introduce the service staff.

MR. LOGAN: Thank you, Helen. And I just want to welcome everybody here today. I very much appreciate
you taking time out of, in many cases, your busy
schedules to come and talk to us and tell us what you
are thinking about relative to this proposed land
exchange and road construction to connect the
communities of King Cove and Cold Bay, Alaska. I
appreciate you being here. This will be one of many
opportunities for the public to be involved in this
process. This is the second of seven scheduled scoping
meetings, which is really the beginning, or near
beginning, of the development of an Environmental
Impact Statement.

You have already met Helen Clough. She is our
Chief of Planning and Policy in the Anchorage Regional
Office. We also have here today Stephanie Brady. She
is the Project Manager we have hired to manage the EIS
process. We have Nancy Hoffman, the Refuge Manager of
the Izembek National Wildlife Refuge, and then we also
have Frederick Milton with us today, and he will be our
timekeeper. Frederick works out of our headquarters
office here in Washington, D.C. So with that, without
further ado, I will let you set up and go. Thank you.

MS. BRADY: Thank you, and thank you for everyone
coming today. As Todd said, I am Stephanie Brady and I am the Coordinator for this project. I am going to be co-presenting today with Nancy Hoffman, the Refuge Manager. This is the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Izembek National Wildlife Refuge Land Exchange Road Corridor Public Scoping Meeting.

So why are we here? We're here because in March of 2009 Congress passed the Omnibus Public Land Management Act and directed the Secretary of Interior to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement to conduct an analysis of the proposed land exchange among the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the State of Alaska and the King Cove Native Corporation. This EIS, or the Environmental Impact Statement, contains an analysis of the proposed land exchange, the potential construction and operation of a road between the communities of King Cove and Cold Bay, the potential road corridors through Izembek National Wildlife Refuge that will be identified by the State of Alaska, the City of King Cove, the Agdaagux Tribe of King Cove and the public.

The legislation also states the cooperating agencies will be any Federal agency that has permitting
jurisdiction over the road, and at this time we are partnering with the Army Corps of Engineers, the State of Alaska, the Aleutians East Borough, the City of King Cove, the Tribe and the Alaskan Migratory Bird Management Council.

In addition to the Environmental Impact Statement and the Record of Decision, or the ROD, the secretary also needs to do a public interest determination to see if it is in the best interest of the public for this land exchange and road to go forward. This is a map of the proposed land exchange road corridor.

To orient you, this is the State of Alaska and this is the Alaska Peninsula. The box indicates the area that is blown up here on the map. This is the boundary for Izembek National Wildlife Refuge, and this green square here is the North Creek Unit of the Alaska peninsula, and that is part of the land exchange that would be exchanged from the State of Alaska to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. These two green dots indicate lands that will be exchanged from the King Cove Corporation to the Fish and Wildlife Service. The red indicates the proposed road corridor through the
Izembek National Wildlife Refuge. Over here is Sitkinak Island, and that is land that will go from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to the State of Alaska. Nancy will further explain this map as far as the refuge boundaries go following the presentation.

So what is proposed? In the land exchange is the removal of 206 acres from Izembek Wilderness and transferred to the State of Alaska, it's the transfer of 1,600 acres of Federal land from Alaskan Maritime, which is on Sitkinak Island to the State of Alaska, and in return, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service would receive over 43,000 acres from the State of Alaska and over 13,000 acres from the King Cove Corporation. Of this exchanged land, 43,000 acres will be designated wilderness.

This is the map that was attached to the legislation, and we also have these in large poster-size copies in the back of the room, so if you want to look at this more closely they are posted out back. This again is the peninsula of Alaska, the black line indicates the boundary of Izembek National Wildlife Refuge, that's the Bering Sea, this is Cold Bay. The
city of Cold Bay but also Cold Bay itself. This green
box up here indicates lands that will come from the
State of Alaska to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
of the North Creek Unit, and the Ws on here indicate
lands that will be designated wilderness. These green
lands here come from the King Cove Corporation to the
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and again the W
represents wilderness. This is the Kinzarof Lagoon.
This is land here that will come from the King Cove
Corporation to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and
that's Mortensen's Lagoon. It will not be designated
wilderness. And then the red is just a proposed road
corridor, it's not set in stone, it's just to show the
isthmus of the Refuge and where our potential road
could go.

These next few slides are some views of the land
exchange. They are photographs of lands in that area.
This first slide is of Izembek National Wildlife
Refuge, the wilderness section. This is the isthmus,
and here on this side, that's Kinzarof Lagoon, and over
there is Izembek Lagoon. So that's looking through,
that's where our potential road corridor could go.
These following lands are the lands that the Fish and Wildlife Service would receive from either the King Cove Corporation or the State of Alaska. This is Mortensen's Lagoon, which would be transferred from the King Cove Corporation. These are the Kinzarof Lagoon bookends, that would again come from the King Cove Corporation, and this is the North Creek Unit, that would come from the State of Alaska. And this is a portion of the lands that are proposed to be exchanged to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. In the back of the room we have an aerial photograph with the boundaries laid over the photograph, so I would encourage you to look at that to get a better idea of the land types. This is Sitkinak Island. The red indicates areas that would go from the Fish and Wildlife Service to the State of Alaska.

So in addition to the land exchange, Kinzarof Lagoon would become a designated State refuge, and this has to happen before the land exchange can occur. So Izembek Lagoon is now a State refuge, so Kinzarof Lagoon would also become a State refuge. The legislation is specific about the designation of the
road corridor, we must minimize the adverse impact of
the road corridor on the refuge, transfer the minimal
amount of acreage of Federal land that is required for
the construction of the road corridor, and to the
maximum extent practical, to incorporate existing roads
into the road corridor.

The limitations on the use of the road corridor:
any portion of the road constructed on Federal land,
which would be transferred to the State of Alaska, will
be used primarily for health and safety purposes, and
only for noncommercial purposes. Of those uses, the
use of taxis, commercial vans for public transportation
and shared rides will be allowed.

Congress also stated that there is a requirement
of a barrier cable; however, as we go through the
process and the development of the Environmental Impact
Statement, if other mitigation measures come up, then
those can be proposed as well. It does not have to be
a cable.

The dimensions and design features of the road:
it's a width not greater than a single lane, it must be
constructed with gravel, it must be constructed with
any mitigation measures relative to the passage of migration of wildlife and the exchange of tidal flow, and it must be constructed to include appropriate safety pullouts.

So again, I talked about the legislation and why we are here. The process we are going through is NEPA, the National Environmental Policy Act, and it's our national charter for the protection of the environment. The purpose of NEPA is to allow the Federal Government to make better informed decisions and to involve citizens in the process.

And this slide indicates the process that we will be going through, and right now the red highlights that we are in the scoping process. So we have published, in the Federal Register, a Notice of Intent back in August, stating that the Fish and Wildlife Service will be going through developing an EIS for this project, and then in February we published a Notice of Intent in the Federal Register, stating that we are going to start public scoping and here is when the meetings are going to be. So we have published two Notices of Intent, so we are in the scoping process. We are
anticipating having a draft EIS completed by spring of 2011, so there will be another public comment period in the summer of 2011 following the draft, a public comment analysis in the fall of 2011, and then a final EIS in the winter of 2012, with a record of decision in the spring of 2012. This is a tentative schedule and is based upon funding of the project.

So what is scoping? It’s a process to involve the public in identifying issues, alternatives and potential impacts of the proposed project, and in this case it is a land exchange and a road corridor at Izembek National Wildlife Refuge. So we have public scoping meetings, we had one last week in Anchorage, you’re here today at the public scoping meeting in Washington, D.C., and the week of April 26th we are going to go to all five communities that surround the Refuge. Scoping ends May first; however, you can still submit comments throughout the process so there will be other opportunities to submit comments.

Past NEPA Actions: To understand where we are now we need to know where we have been. In 1998 Congress passed the King Cove Health and Safety Act for
improvements to the King Cove Medical Clinic, to their airport and to provide a road marine transportation system. An EIS was written for this project and a proposed road corridor was discussed in this Environmental Impact Statement, but an in-depth analysis was not completed, so this is good baseline information that we can base this EIS. There is data that has been collected and information that is available that we can use to further this process.

At this time I would like to turn it over to Nancy Hoffman, the Refuge Manager.

MS. HOFFMAN: Thank you, Stephanie. Hi, I'm Nancy Hoffman, Refuge Manager at Izembek. I am going to give you a brief summary of what the Refuge is, the resources, scale it down to the communities in the area and then down to the two cities that are involved in this proposed action.

So Izembek National Wildlife Range was established in 1960. This is the fiftieth anniversary of the Refuge. It was re-designated as a National Wildlife Refuge by the ANILCA, the Alaska National Interest Conservation Act, and in the same year they designated
wilderness within the boundaries of the Refuge, and that's the Izembek wilderness. About 90 percent of the Refuge is wilderness.

So I am just going to give you a lowdown on the boundaries of the Refuge and the lands that the Refuge also manages or administers. This right here, this is the boundary of Izembek, the Refuge itself, right here. Izembek is responsible to manage units of two other national wildlife refuges, one is Alaska Maritime Refuge and that's the Unimak Island portion, and then there is the Pavlof and the North Creek units, right up in here. And then the proposed land exchange, two sections from the State coming to the refuge system, referred to as the North Creek, and those are right there. So the boundary responsibility of the Izembek National Wildlife Refuge is to manage from about here to the western end of Unimak Island.

So the Izembek area refuge is rich in culture. The Aleut people have lived there for many, many moons. Back in the late 18th century and early 19th century explorers came from Russia and the European explorers, and they came to take advantage of the resources, the 

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trapping and the fur trade. So there is still today a
strong influence of Russian and other explorers.

It also has a military history. Cold Bay, which
is a hub or headquarters for the Refuge, was a center
for World War II, and Fort Randall was established
there and more than 20,000 troops were stationed there.
So as these troops came in, a lot of Quonset huts were
built. A lot of the facilities, military facilities,
have been removed, but as you are out hiking or
exploring you still come across military debris.

The Refuge Izembek predates ANILCA, but ANILCA
came in 1980, and it was passed by Congress and
conservation units were established, and these units
were set aside for present and future generations.
Each of these units are significant in some way, be it
scenic, or wilderness, scientifically, recreationally.
Other parts of ANILCA that were passed were to also
make sure that the rural residents could still continue
their subsistence way of living, so that section was
included.

These conservation units brought a lot of lands to
the public system, and in Alaska it brought over 56
million acres of new lands to the refuge system, and that brought it up to over 76 million acres in the refuge system lands in Alaska.

Refuges are established and are based on a purpose, and that's all refuges across the country. But on top of those purposes, ANILCA laid on four more, and so this slide outlines those purposes. There is the conservation of fish, wildlife and habitats. We still fulfill our international treaty regulations, providing opportunities for subsistence, and then also making sure that we have enough water, and a high quality.

In 1964 the Wilderness Act was passed, and this act established a system, a National Wildlife Preservation System. Wilderness is described as land where the natural community is left untrammeled, that's not un-trampled, that untrammeled, like uncontrolled or unhindered, and where humans come and visit, enjoy but not stay. So wilderness areas are -- consider them like a baseline, compared to the areas of development that us humans develop over time, and so it's a place to go back and say, oh, this is still a wild place as a
Now wilderness in Alaska is different than on the mainland or the lower 48. In Alaska there are exceptions, and under ANILCA you can use methods that were traditionally used. An example of Title 11 is airplanes, motorboats and snowmobiles are allowed in wilderness, and in addition, corridors can also be considered.

Izembek National Wildlife Refuge is considered a gem in the system, the National Wildlife Refuge System, but within the Refuge there is also an over 300,000 acre lagoon, Izembek Lagoon, and it is a State game refuge. So it also has a large mass, the largest stand of eelgrass in the country, and it provides food and shelter for migratory birds. We have about a quarter of a million water birds that migrate through Izembek and use this area during migration.

The most impressive resident by size would be the brown bear. There is a large concentration in the Joshua Green River area, and that is to the west of the body of water of Cold Bay. Also we have herds of caribou that move through the area, use the isthmus,
migrating back and forth, spring and fall, and we have
wolves and fox, wolverines, minks, some of the
terrestrial species.

Then if you go more to the coastal end we have
seals and sea lions, we have critical habitat for sea
otters in Cold Bay. Also, salmon begin and end their
live stages in the Refuge.

So besides these resources that we have, there is
also a special recognition of this Refuge. And there
is the Biosphere Reserve, which works with sustainable
uses of these natural resources. It's also a Ramsar
site, which is a world-renowned wetland designation.
It is the first in the United States to be designated.
It is also an important bird area, so it's a
conservation area of global importance.

So another purpose of ANILCA that we are
responsible for is opportunities for subsistence, and
these are some of the opportunities out there. Another
one is fish, fisheries is a large subsistence activity.

The Refuge is a big place and people come out and
enjoy it, so the public is always out there. It's a
lot of hiking, fishing, camping, berry picking, it's
all there, come on out.

So now I am going to scale down and bring you back to the peninsula and look at the communities around there and just outline a few. So the peninsula has a boundary on the north of the Bering Sea and the South Pacific Ocean. Again, this is a Izembek Refuge here. And King Cove is on the Pacific side, it is exposed over on this end. On the west side of the bay is Cold Bay. These are the five communities we will be doing scoping in at the end of April. All these communities use resources within the boundaries of the Izembek National Wildlife Refuge.

So I will start with Cold Bay and go into two other communities that are involved in this. It would have to be in the fall when there is a lot of visitors there, but the population of Cold Bay is around 80 people, 90 people, and less than a quarter of those are Alaska natives. Like I had mentioned before, the place is rich with archeological and historical sites. The city of Cold Bay was incorporated in 1982. The major employer in Cold Bay is the government; it's federal, state and local, in addition to flight services. Like
a lot of communities, subsistence helps supplement
income.

As I mentioned before, Cold Bay was a strategic
spot in the War, World War II, and from what I
understand it was chosen because of the cloud density,
it's pretty overcast and foggy there quite often. The
runway at the time of the War was the largest runway in
the State of Alaska. It is now the fifth largest in
Alaska. It is a hub. There are daily flights coming
in and flights going out to support local communities
in goods and services.

I will point out the city of King Cove. It's on
the Pacific side so it's not as protected as Cold Bay.
It's about 20 miles between the two, and it's about a
half hour air flight. I don't know if you can see
this, but it's right in here. So the city of Cold Bay
has a population of less than 800 and almost half are
Alaska natives. There is a federally recognized tribe,
the Agdaagux Tribe. King Cove was founded in 1922 by
Scandinavians and it was a cannery. King Cove just
celebrated its sixtieth birthday last year. The
economy there is dependent on commercial fisheries and
also there is a Peter Pan seafood facility there that employs a lot of people. Again, like a lot of the communities, subsistence is an important way and helps supplement their income.

Now like many rural communities, King Cove is only accessible by plane and by sea. It does not have a runway that is good in all weather, it is gravel, there are no lights for landing at night. You can see by the train in the previous picture and this one, that it is steep, wind can whip through there, and so it's tough to be a pilot there. There have been air flight casualties, fatalities, and the people of King Cove believe that this connection of this road between King Cove and Cold Bay is primarily an issue of health and safety for the residents of King Cove.

Okay, so you know that you are in a public scoping meeting and these are all public lands that we're talking about, and you are the public, so we are asking you to give us some comments today. We are hoping you will gives us some oral testimony and hopefully you have signed up in the back, and if not, you can sign up now. We also are taking written comments and there is
forms for that, so we hope you provide comments, that's how we will build a good EIS and evaluate this proposed project. And if you leave here and think, oh I forgot something, then we have other opportunities. We have email, there is an email address on there. You can fax us. There is also snail mail. We also have a web site, you can go in there. We don't Twitter or Tweet, or Facebook, but maybe we will get there someday.

So, now I am just going to review the time line one more time. So again, the Notice of Intent was posted in the Federal Register. We are now in the scoping period. The next scoping meetings will be at the end of April at the remote communities. We hope to have a draft EIS completed by April, 2011, and following that we will have a comment period. This will also be advertised in the Federal Register, and that will be in the summer of 2011. Following the close of that comment period we will do analysis of the comments and then hopefully by the winter of 2012, we will have a final EIS, and then that will be followed by the record of decision. So I want to thank you again, and I hope we hear comments from you.
MS. CLOUGH: Thank you, Nancy. We're going to go ahead now, and if people have any questions they want to ask, we can do that. I will ask that you come to the microphone because we are recording everything. There are microphones on both sides and they are adjustable for people of different heights.

So if anybody has any questions they want to ask of Todd, Nancy or Stephanie, now is the time to do it. Otherwise, we will move into taking comments. So does anyone have any questions about the project or what we're up to?

Okay, I am just going to reiterate how we are going to do the comments, and because there is not a tremendously large number of people signed up, I will give everybody four minutes initially because some people may plan on coming in later. I ask that you come forth and I'll call your name. I apologize if I couldn't read your handwriting and/or can't pronounce your name. I assume I will get it close enough that you will know who you are. Come forward, please state your name for the record, for the court reporter, and then provide your comments.
Frederick will be timing you. We are going to give you four minutes, and when you have one minute left he will raise this lovely yellow folder, and when you are done he will raise the red folder and I will have to cut you off because we want to make sure, and I know your time is very valuable, that everybody has a chance to be heard. And as I said earlier, if we have time afterwards and people want to make additional comments we can do that, as well we do encourage you to provide written comments, those of you that would like to do that. So without further ado, our first commenter is Phyllis Mains.

MS. MAINS: And did you want my address?

MS. CLOUGH: We don't need your address, but if you can come up and speak at the microphone.

MS. MAINS: I'm Phyllis Mains and I thank you so much for this opportunity to hear my comments for the environmental impact statement being drafted regarding the proposed land exchange and road in Izembek National Wildlife Refuge. I oppose the road because the road is not necessary. In 1998 Congress addressed the health and safety needs of King Cove with the King Cove Health
and Safety Act. That legislation provided 37.5 million dollars of taxpayers' money to upgrade King Cove's medical facilities, purchase a Hovercraft for regular ferry and emergency medical service between King Cove and Cold Bay. Construct a new marine terminals and construct a road between King Cove and the Hovercraft terminal.

This law specifically prohibited a road through Izembek's federally protected wilderness. The Hovercraft has been 100 percent effective and provided rapid life-saving medical evacuations, and takes about 20 minutes. The trip would take approximately one to two hours in good weather on the proposed road.

The land swap would sacrifice 206 acres of the most unique and valuable internationally recognized wetlands habitat that bicep a narrow isthmus between Izembek and Kinzarof Lagoons for about 61,000 acres of lands with far lesser value. Major impacts from the road include road construction, noise, sediment runoff, watershed impacts, air and water pollution from gas and diesel engines, disruption of migrations, habitat fragmentation, to name just a few. Alaska is warming
twice as fast as the lower 48 states and melting permafrost, current and projected warming impacts must be included in the environmental impact statement.

Nothing can compensate for the irreversible impacts a road would have on Izembek's critically important cold water lagoons and internationally significant wetlands, which provide resting places for migrating waterfowl.

The cold water lagoons of Izembek Refuge contain some of the world's largest eelgrass beds. More than 98 percent of the world's Pacific Black Brant use the Izembek Lagoons for their fall migration to Mexico.

Birds from all over the Arctic funnel through the Izembek Refuge. Many of those birds find their way to Iowa. We were surprised one summer when 35 Black Scotters, Arctic Black Scotters, dived in our farm pond. The loss of these birds could have a devastating impact, not only on Iowa's economy but all states with the loss of hunting and bird watching. Hunters and bird watchers buy a lot of equipment, they buy food and lodging. We have hunting and bird watching in Iowa.

Congress created the Izembek National Wildlife Refuge to conserve fish and wildlife in their habitats.
and to fulfill the United States international treaty obligations, provide continued subsistence by local residents and to preserve water quality within the refuge. The wildlife values of Izembek are globally significant and should not be compromised. All Americans benefit from the protection of the wilderness status of the Izembek National Refuge, and I urge you to consider the damaging impact of an unnecessary road, to be paid for and maintained by American taxpayers who could lose many of the birds they watch. Thank you for listening to my comments.

MS. CLOUGH: Thank you very much. Our next speaker is Lauren Hierl from the Alaska Wilderness League.

MS. HIERL: Hello. Thank you for the opportunity to talk to you today. My name is Lauren Hierl and I represent the Alaska Wilderness League based here in Washington, and we aim to be your voice for Alaska's wilderness in our nation's capital. The proposed land exchange and road through Alaska's Izembek National Wildlife Refuge is a detriment to our wilderness legacy in America's last frontier.
Last year this land exchange and road was authorized by Congress as a poison pill in an otherwise groundbreaking public lands bill. The road was requested by the residents of King Cove, who claim it is needed to assure safe transport to Cold Bay in the event of an emergency. In truth, U.S. taxpayers have already provided a safe and reliable transportation system to the King Cove community when Congress appropriated 37.5 million dollars in 1998 to address this issue.

The Izembek Refuge is a vitally important place for hundreds of thousands of birds, scores of other wildlife, and all Americans who care about preserving a piece of our natural heritage for future generations. Today I will discuss how the Izembek National Wildlife Refuge is a critical area ecologically, and the proposed road is not needed by the residents of the area, meaning that the road and land exchange is not in the public interest.

The proposed road would cut through the heart of one of the world's most critically important resting places for migrating waterfowl. Virtually all of the...
world's Pacific Black Brant and Emperor Geese use
Izembek's cold water lagoons and internationally
significant wetlands as a place to feed and rest. As
proposed, the road would drive right through the
Izembek isthmus, which lies between some of the largest
eelgrass beds in the world. They provide food vital to
the survival of more than a quarter million migratory
birds. In addition to Pacific Black Brant and Emperor
Geese, Pacific Golden Plovers, Rock Sandpipers, Dulins
and Tundra Swans depend on the Izembek Refuge for
wintering, breeding molting, refueling, staging and
resting. Mammals such as brown bear, caribou, red fox,
wolves and other wildlife make extensive use of the
Izembek isthmus as well.

In addition to the direct impacts to wildlife,
this road would set a dangerous precedent for
wilderness areas across the country. The proposed road
would be the first ever to bisect a congressionally
designated wilderness, despite the fact that by
definition, wilderness is meant to be a place where
humans leave no mark. If this road were built, it would
open the door to similar destructive projects in other
wilderness areas.

While Congress proposed a land exchange to make up for the destruction of this vital wilderness area, the lands to be exchanged are uplands with lower wildlife habitat value that are currently not threatened by development. The wetlands of Izembek National Wildlife Refuge, on the other hand, have been globally recognized as wetlands of international importance under the Ramsar Convention.

Perhaps the most puzzling part of this whole issue is the fact that Congress solved King Cove's transportation problem more than ten years ago. In 1998 Congress appropriated 37.5 million taxpayer dollars to provide a modern medical clinic for the 800 residents of King Cove, a 98-foot state-of-the-art Hovercraft, a gravel road and two terminals for 20-minute emergency medical evacuations from King Cove to the jet airport at Cold Bay. Since operations began in 2007, the Hovercraft has flawlessly performed more than 35 medical evacuations in all seasons and all weather conditions.

Despite the fact that the road would take much
longer to traverse than the Hovercraft, a crucial fact in an emergency medical situation, and that the road may be impassable during parts of the winter, the residents of King Cove are once again asking for a gravel road to be built through the heart of the Izembek wilderness with a whopping price tag of 20 to 25 million taxpayer dollars on top of the 37.5 million already authorized to address this issue. This one road to nowhere that Americans cannot afford.

The facts are clear. The Izembek wilderness is too important to waste on a needless road. I implore Secretary Salazar to conduct a careful Environmental Impact Statement process, which I am confident will show that this road is not in the public interest.

Thanks so much for your time.

MS. CLOUGH: Thank you. Our next speaker is Taldi Walter from the National Audubon Society. Forgive me if I butchered your name.

MS. WALTER: That's all right, it's a little different. Good afternoon and that you for the opportunity to submit scoping comments on the Environmental Impact Statement being drafted for the
proposed land exchange and road in Izembek National Wildlife Refuge. My name is Taldi Walter, and I am the Assistant Director of Government Relations for National Audubon Society. Audubon is the oldest conservation organization in the country and is supported by a half million members, 470 chapters and 37 states -- or we have staff in 37 states. Audubon and our membership have been actively involved with this issue for over a decade, and continue to have a high interest in conserving this internationally significant habitat.

Izembek National Wildlife Refuge on the Alaska peninsula is one of the world's most critically important northern wetlands for migratory birds. Virtually all the world's Pacific Brant stop at Izembek and Kinzarof Lagoons during their migrations to rest and feed in one of the world's largest eelgrass beds. Eelgrass beds and surrounding wetlands are utilized by hundreds of thousands of waterfowl and shore birds including substantial numbers of Emperor Geese, Tundra Swans and the threatened Steller's Eider. Caribou, brown bears, wolves, marine mammals and numerous species of fish also depend on the refuge lands and
adjacent waters in the proposed project area for their survival.

The proposed road corridor would bisect the Izembek isthmus, which lies between two lagoons and is an important nesting area for Tundra Swans and a migration corridor for the caribou. There are many scientifically documented impacts to wildlife associated with roads, including habitat loss and fragmentation, displacement of wildlife and elevated mortality from increased human access. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has already documented many of the significant environmental impacts this road would produce in previous documents, including the King Cove Access Project EIS in 2004.

Although the land exchange would add more acres to the Refuge, the proposed acres are not comparable in their habitat values. The exceptional habitat that will be lost in the projected road corridor is significant because it provides an irreplaceable ecological linkage within the Refuge. No amount of exchanged lands can compensate for the irreversible impacts the road will have on this globally significant
wetland habitat. Specifically, Audubon recommends that the Fish and Wildlife Service address the following issues in their EIS:

- Impacts to fish and wildlife and their habits from the proposed road including road construction, sediment runoff and impacts to water quality and hydrology, road avoidance by wildlife and loss and fragmentation of habitat.

- Potential impacts to eelgrass beds, which provide vital habitat for many birds and marine organisms, is a significant concern and should be explicitly addressed.

- Long-term cumulative impacts to wildlife populations and their habitats from a road bisecting the significant wetland habitat and ecological corridor should be assessed in the context of how such impacts may be compounded by climate change.

- Potential impacts to threatened and endangered terrestrial and marine species and their habitats.

- A cost-benefit analysis of the road that considers the previous investments from the King Cove Health and Safety Act to improve transportation in the region.

This analysis should also analyze the cost-
effectiveness of the current transportation system, the combination road and marine Hovercraft link, to the proposed one-lane gravel road.

And finally, a compatibility determination as required in the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act.

Thank you for considering our comments.

MS. CLOUGH: Thanks. Our next speaker is Stanley Mack from the Aleutians East Borough.

(pause)

MR. MACK: My name is Stanley Mack, and I'm the mayor of the Aleutians East Borough. (Difficulty with microphone - changes microphone.) Thank you. This one here is warmed up. My name is Stanley Mack and I'm the Mayor of the Aleutians East Borough. I was born and raised in King Cove, lived out there all my life. The community of King Cove and Cold Bay and the Izembek Refuge area within the boundaries of the Borough.

Thank you for this opportunity to comment on a proposed land exchange and road corridor through Izembek Refuge. Because I am here in our nation's capital, I have been thinking about the project, this
project, compared to projects nationally. I am not necessarily in tune with that many projects coming in here from other parts of the country, but I am pretty sure that not many of them are initiated and led by residents of a community of less than 1,000 people in the place, so remote that most Americans can't even imagine. I bet most do not have nearly as much grassroots support as this land exchange.

I wonder how many other hearings in Washington, D.C., have been the result of a community request for a single-lane gravel road less than 20 miles long. A road that will provide access to a world class airport. Not many other projects discussed in Washington, D.C., have such a huge local contribution.

The King Cove folks are not asking the government's handout or a freebie. They have paid dearly in their only currency, Aborigine lands. What they hope to receive in exchange is simple and honest access to an airport that they can depend on in an emergency for their aging parents, and for their children, and for their friends and neighbors with special health concerns, for the peace of mind of
knowing that medical help is within reach even if the weather is bad.

Now we heard comments about the eelgrass bed. This road would be at least two miles or better away from the eelgrass beds. Our proposal does not cause streams running into the lagoon, so there would be no problems there. We have heard concerns about subsistence use. Folks in King Cove are subsistence hunters, not sports hunters. We never were, never will be and hope that our children and grandchildren will do the same.

Furthermore, I expect the mitigation measures will protect the resources that are so valuable to the King Cove and Cold Bay residents. Nobody knows better than the people living in the Aleutians East Borough what a jewel the Izembek Refuge is and how important protection for the future generations of the Aleuts is.

The Aleutian East Borough will submit details and formal comments in writing. We will ask for this EIS to look at specific issues, that is important to us. We will ask the secretary to exercise his trust responsibilities to the Aleut people to this process,
especially important to that King Cove voice were not heard, prior to the Refuge formation. We will also participate in future scoping meetings to be held in our communities. Thank you. I appreciate this opportunity.

MS. CLOUGH: Thank you. Our next speaker is Gary Hennigh from the city of King Cove. And I think we have both microphones on for future speakers.

MR. HENNIGH: Good afternoon. My name is Gary Hennigh. I have been the City Administrator for the City of King Cove for the past 20 years, and I am speaking today in that role. I have been actively involved in planning and advocating for a road between King Cove and Cold Bay since the early 1980s, when I worked for the Alaska Department of Transportation.

In retrospect, I find it interesting that even the Department of Transportation back in the early '80s did not know that the ANILCA Act meant what it meant in terms of prohibiting access through the Izembek National Wildlife Refuge. Then, when Alaska Democratic Governor Tony Knowles proclaimed in the summer of 1995 that he was going to construct this road, we actually
started to believe that the time had arrived for resolving at least one of the rural remote Alaska transportation challenges that exist. The issue quickly become controversial and has remained in that status for the last fifteen years. It is true that Congress tried to solve our transportation access issue in 1998 and 1999, but with a solution that simply does not work.

However, our critics have never been interested in learning why that solution has not worked, and why we still have this transportation access issue. It also was at that time that our critics decided that the truth does not really matter. We started hearing insulting comments like, why do people live in a place like King Cove, or that the environmental degradation that this road would mean to the Izembek Refuge would be atrocious, or that whatever might be authorized to happen in Izembek to resolve our access issue today would set a precedence for similar issues throughout the country. I respectfully suggest that for reasonable people, there are reasonable answers to all of those concerns.
I have faith that this EIS process with adequately and fairly analyze why this unprecedented land exchange is in the best interest of the Federal Government, and why our modest road link to the Cold Bay airport will not have a detrimental impact on the Refuge, and why the residents of King Cove deserve this transportation access as part of their social economic wellbeing. I also have faith that when the EIS is completed and the Secretary of the Interior will fulfill his trust responsibility obligation to the indigenous people of King Cove, that he will see fit to issue a favorable public interest finding for this land exchange. Are these unreasonable expectations? I don't think so.

Thank you.

MS. CLOUGH: Thank you, Gary. Our next speaker is the Honorable Don Young, Congressman from Alaska.

MR. YOUNG: I don't know what that thing is.

MS. CLOUGH: It protects the cords.

MR. YOUNG: Thank you for allowing me to speak on behalf of the Izembek road and especially the community of King Cove. I agree with everything that the previous speaker said. I have been involved in this
issue now for approximately twenty years. I was one of
the original introductions of the access road for the
people of King Cove.

For those that do not live there, they don't
understand the importance of this. We're talking about
American lives. We just had a terrible tragedy in
Haiti and everybody rose to help those people. We
responded, and now I believe through this study you
will respond to the people of King Cove. When you have
a pregnant mother that has a possibility of a
miscarriage and they can't get to Cold Bay because we
didn't build a road. Some people will say yes, we did
try to get a ferry that would be in place, but it
doesn't work correctly. It's never dependable. And
for those who don't know and have never been there, I
say shame on you. I am pleased to hear that you're
going to have an opportunity to visit King Cove and
other villages around that area, in the Borough.

And understand the importance of this for economic
reasons, yes, we understand that. Access to one of the
finest airports in the State of Alaska and this nation,
by a small village, instead of having to fly out of an
airport, which I have, which has taken lives.

This is about people. It is not by somebody in Washington, D.C., or someone carrying a sign outside wearing a bird uniform. This is about people. And, in fact, Cold Bay and region has numerous roads. This is not new. This is not a virgin area, this is an area that has exposed itself many times by the military and by the State of Alaska.

And may I remind you, other than some outsiders, there is no opposition to this road. I will say that the people in the area of King Cove and the Aleuts there have really stepped forward. They are giving up a considerable amount of land that belongs to them, the fish and wildlife, to improve the state fish and wildlife, and federal. They are willing to take the sacrifice, a potential inheritance to their people, so they have access to protect their people.

So as we go through this process I hope we study the whole thing, not only the economic aspect of it, but the social aspect of it, which is crucial to these people. And I am one that represents them and have been involved in it, because I have been there.
have flown a plane in there, in terrible weather. I wouldn't do it again as old as I am now. When you're young, you're stupid. But I don't want my people in the State of Alaska having to face that when they're willing to put up, and the state is willing to support, and other entities will support it, I think we ought to give them a chance -- their just due. This is America, it's not a special interest group that says no to everything. This is America.

So I would like to thank all of you for this -- allowing me to speak. I hope as you go through these hearings you understand the total aspect of how this does help the people and this is what we're about. Thank you very much.

MS. CLOUGH: Thank you, Congressman Young. Our next speaker is Lenny Corin.

MR. CORIN: Hi. I'm Lenny Corin and I retired from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service approximately two years ago, and I am speaking on my own behalf. I spent most of my career in Alaska and I was the Deputy Assistant Regional Director for Refuges and Wildlife when, about 15 years ago, the Aleutians East Borough
proposed a land track across the isthmus of the Izembek Refuge to allow for a road to connect the cities of King Cove and Cold Bay. It's my understanding that since the Hovercraft became fully operational in 2007, it has successfully addressed every Medivac need. Unfortunately, it's proved to be expensive and to maximize use and minimize the financial drain on the local community of King Cove and the Aleutians East Borough, it would need to be subsidized.

The underlying need for the road as it was originally proposed was to address the health and safety issue, and that has been successfully dealt with. The apparent issue today is not health and safety but the financial viability of the Hovercraft link that was paid for with U.S. taxpayer dollars. And now, instead of addressing that need, we are embarking upon a 1.5 to 2 million dollar evaluation process and then potentially a 20 to 25 million dollar construction project, when a less damaging and more cost effective solution would be to establish a fund to subsidize the operation of the Hovercraft.

Now, will the road better address the health and
safety needs of the City of King Cove? Having spent time in the area throughout the year, I know that maintaining a 33 and a half mile road from King Cove Airport to Cold Bay would, at times, be difficult, particularly in the winter. Even though the amount of snow in the winter is not that great, the nearly constant winds can result in pretty substantial snow drifts and a constant test for snowplows. Certainly, maintaining a four mile road to the current Hovercraft site would be a much easier job. As a result the Hovercraft would be, and will continue to be, a much more reliable link to the Cold Bay Airport.

I recommend that the EIS examine the cost versus the benefits of the proposed road, compared to the investments that have already been made under the King Cove Health and Safety Act for the current road and Hovercraft link between these two communities. It should also examine the expected reliability of the road versus Hovercraft in terms of addressing future Medivacs.

There is no question that the narrow isthmus between the Izembek and Kinzarof Lagoons is extremely
important to fish and wildlife resources of the Refuge. The lagoons and isthmus support significant populations of Pacific Black Brant, Emperor Geese, Canada Geese, Tundra Swans, Steller's Eiders, hundreds of thousands of ducks and tens of thousands of shorebirds. The lagoon and the narrow strip of land between them, the very heart of the Izembek Refuge, is certainly of much higher value than the lands being offered in exchange. Neither of the two townships being offered by the state, nor the majority of the King Cove Corporation parcels have a habitat value comparable to that which would be traded away.

And what are the threats in regard to the land that would be removed from the Refuge? The very threat is the land exchange. Many of the species that depend upon the area will be adversely impacted by the development and operation of the proposed road.

Obviously, the best way to avoid that risk would be to go with a no-action alternative. And what is the threat to the lands that would be added to the Refuge as a result of the proposed land exchange? I am not aware of any impending threat to the fish and wildlife
resources. If left in their present state they will continue to support healthy populations of fish and wildlife.

The EIS will need to examine the short-term impacts of the road, including construction and maintenance and the long-term cumulative impacts of the road on fish and wildlife resources, including their habitats. This analysis should compare these impacts to the potential for impacts to the lands that would be acquired by the Refuge. Thank you.

MS. CLOUGH: Thank you. Our next speaker is David Raskin, from the Friends of Alaska National Wildlife Refuges.

MR. RASKIN: Thank you for the opportunity to provide these comments. My name is David Raskin. I represent the Friends of Alaska National Wildlife Refuges, which I serve as president.

In 1998, Congress appropriated 37 and a half million dollars for a modern medical clinic for the 700 residents of King Cove, 17 and a half miles of yet uncompleted road, and a 98-foot state-of-the-art Hovercraft, and terminals for 20-minute emergency
medical evacuations from King Cove to the jet airport at Cold Bay. Since 2007, the Hovercraft has flawlessly performed more than 35 medical evacuations in all seasons and weather conditions, eliminating the need for the road.

In spite of this success, King Cove and AEB sold the two spare engines and attempted to sell, without the required consent of the Fish and Wildlife Service, the Hovercraft purchased with 9 million dollars of taxpayer funds. The Borough recently announced plans for a 75 million dollar airport project, including the purchase of a similar Hovercraft to ferry passengers between Akun and Akutan across waters that experience more severe weather and seas than those in Cold Bay. The Borough will pay the cost of operation, I emphasize, will pay the cost of operation of the Hovercraft, even though their only justification for the proposed Izembek road, is that they cannot afford the cost of the Hovercraft operations. Paying for the operation of the Akutan Hovercraft clearly belies their main argument for the proposed Izembek road.

Traveling the 35-mile gravel road from King Cove
to Cold Bay would require one to two hours in good weather and clear, dry conditions. Seriously ill passengers would be imperiled by such a lengthy trip across difficult terrain, subject to high winds, blizzards, ice and snow slides. Maintaining and keeping the road passable under these conditions would be extremely costly and it would be impassable at times.

The Refuge would transfer 206 acres within Izembek Refuge wilderness for a road corridor in the most sensitive and important wildlife habitat in the entire Refuge. The road would bisect the Izembek isthmus, which lies between the largest eelgrass beds in the world, and provides food vital for survival of more than a half million migratory birds that depend on Izembek for wintering, breeding, molting, refueling, staging and resting grounds. Izembek would receive 56,000 acres that are under no foreseeable threat, and cannot replace the exceptional habitat and wildlife values lost in the proposed road corridor.

In designating Izembek National Wildlife Refuge and Wilderness in 1980, Congress provided the highest
level of protection and stated:

"The Izembek Wilderness proposes outstanding scenery, key populations of brown bear, caribou and other wilderness-related wildlife and critical watersheds to Izembek Lagoon.

About 68 percent of the total lands in Izembek Lagoon are covered with the largest eelgrass beds in the world. These beds are utilized by millions of waterfowl for migration and wintering purposes. A wilderness designation will protect this critically important habitat by restricting access to the lagoon."

In 1986, President Reagan designated Izembek as the first Ramsar site. In 1991, it was named as a sister refuge with Russia's Kronotsky State Biosphere.

The National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act states:

"The system was created to conserve fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats ... serves a pivotal role in the conservation of migratory birds, anadromous and interjurisdictional fish, marine mammals,"
endangered and threatened species and the
habitats on which these species depend ... and
assists in the fulfillment of important
international treaty obligations of the U.S.
with regard to fish, wildlife, and plants and
their habitats."

In light of these issues and importance, it
doesn't make any sense to expend an additional 20
million or more of taxpayer funds to justify and
construct an unnecessary, dangerous and environmentally
damaging road through the heart of Izembek Refuge
Wilderness. The Friends of Alaska are confident that a
thorough, complete scientific analysis will provide a
clear basis for concluding the proposed land exchange
and road must be rejected because they are incompatible
with the purposes of Izembek National Wildlife Refuge,
and contrary to the public interest. Thank you very
much, and I have submitted more detailed comments for
the record.

MS. CLOUGH: Yes, thank you. Our next speaker is
Della Trumble, with the King Cove Corporation.

MS. TRUMBLE: Good afternoon. My name is Della
Trumble and I speak today as a representative, shareholder, and member of the King Cove Corporation and Agdaagux tribe of King Cove respectively. I was born, raised, and have lived most of my life in King Cove. Please know that for more than half of my adult life I have been actively involved in advocating, promoting and lobbying for this road connecting my community to the Cold Bay Airport.

You should also know that my work on this issue shall never end until we achieve our goal of seeing this road become reality. I believe this reality is now getting closer, but I never thought it would take a land exchange of this magnitude and sacrifice. The fact that my Corporation is willing to give the Federal Government back 20 percent of the lands that were given to us to resolve our Aboriginal land rights is still difficult for me to accept, but my focus is now shifted to help create a better future for those coming after my generation. I have testified in front of Congress many times on this topic, as well as at the first EIS scoping session in Anchorage last week.

My basic message continues to be that a simple
road is the only logical, affordable and dependable transportation connection between King Cove and Cold Bay. This gravel single-lane road will connect my community to the Cold Bay Airport, which is our access connection to the outside world. It is indeed a road to somewhere. It is about improving the quality of life for my family, friends and my Aleut culture. Transportation accessibility is a quality of life factor that people in the lower 48 do take for granted.

Now it is finally time for the EIS process to begin, and I am anxious for this process to sort out the facts from all the mistruths and emotional hyperbole that have surrounded this issue for decades. I am confident that an honest assessment of the issues involved in the land exchange and road connection will show that this modest and highly regulated road will not impact the unique human and natural environment in this area.

I ask that our critics respect the same values of science, integrity and honesty in this process that we do. Is that asking too much for reasonable people? I thank you again for this opportunity.
Ms. Clough: Our next speaker is Julie Kates, from the Defenders of Wildlife.

Ms. Kates: Thank you for this opportunity.

Ms. Cough: Can you come use this microphone? That one seems to have faded out on us again. Sorry about that. Thank you.

Ms. Kates: Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the propose land exchange and road corridor through Izembek National Wildlife Refuge. My name is Julie Kates and I'm the Refuge associate for Defenders of Wildlife. Defenders is a national, non-profit conservation organization dedicated to the protection and restoration of all wild animals and plants in their natural communities. We represent more than one million members and supporters nationwide. Defenders opposes a land exchange and road through Izembek Refuge. We have engaged on this issue since 1997 and have consistently argued that these actions would harm wildlife, compromise the purposes for which the Refuge was established, and set a bad precedent that could allow for the removal of wilderness designation elsewhere in the Refuge system.
The area of Izembek Refuge proposed for exchange and road construction is often referred to as the heart of the Refuge, with lagoons that hold some of the largest eelgrass beds in the world. These beds support abundant plant, animal and sea life, including hundreds of thousands of waterfowl. Among the species that depend on this area are the brown bear, caribou, sea otter, Emperor Goose, Tundra Swan and threatened Steller's Eider.

The Fish and Wildlife Service should analyze the impacts a road could have on these species due to such factors as traffic, noise, degradation of habitat and water quality, and the introduction of invasive species. The Pacific Black Brant is one of the species most likely to be negatively impacted by this proposal. More than 98 percent of the world's Pacific Black Brant population uses this area for food and rest before migrating to Mexico in the winter. Changing climate conditions may be responsible for an increase in the number of Black Brant that instead remain on the Alaskan peninsula through the winter. With climate change expected to continue to impact ecological
systems, it is imperative that we maintain the
integrity of key wildlife strongholds such as Izembek
Refuge. I urge you to consider the effects that
climate change will have on the wildlife that inhabit
this Refuge, and the role that a road would have in
exacerbating these impacts.

Secretarial Order 3289 states that each Bureau and
Office of the Department must consider and analyze
potential climate change impacts when making major
decisions regarding potential use of resources under
the Department's purview. Among the purposes for which
Izembek was established are the conservation of fish
and wildlife and the fulfillment of international
treaty obligations, such as the Migratory Bird
Conventions and the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands.

If carried out, this proposal will seriously
compromise these purposes, as well as the integrity of
the Refuge and the system as a whole. Izembek Refuge
includes approximately 300,000 acres of wilderness, a
designation that recognizes the tremendous values
contained in the Refuge by affording this area with the
highest level of federal protection. A decision to
transfer the lands, and therefore remove this
designation, would not only contribute to a significant
loss of wilderness value for those who visit the
Refuge, but would also render the permanent protection
afforded by wilderness designation meaningless, and
would literally pave the way for other wilderness areas
to be similarly loss.

On behalf of Defenders of Wildlife, I urge you to
carefully and thoroughly consider the many harmful
impacts this road will have as you prepare the EIS.

Thank you.

MS. CLOUGH: Thanks. Our next speaker is Nicole
Whittington-Evans, from the Wilderness Society.

MS. WHITTINGTON-EVANS: My name is Nicole
Whittington-Evans, and I am here on behalf of the
Wilderness Society. Thank you very much for the
opportunity to comment during the scoping process for
this proposed Izembek land exchange and road. I am the
acting Alaska regional director of the Wilderness
Society.

The Wilderness Society's mission is to protect
wilderness and to inspire Americans to care for our
wild places. It is our calling and our passion to protect America's wilderness, not as a relic of our nation's past, but as a driving ecological community that is central to life itself. With approximately 225,000 members nationwide, the Wilderness Society has over 750 members in Alaska, all of whom share an interest in how the Izembek National Wildlife Refuge is managed.

I have been to the Izembek Refuge, and stayed in both King Cove and Cold Bay, as well as participating in a couple of fly-overs of much of the Refuge and the proposed exchange lands within and adjacent to the Refuge. I have also been engaged in this road issue since the late 1990s. The Wilderness Society opposes the land exchange and road proposal because we believe it is unnecessary and that it will result in irreparable impacts to the designated wilderness and sensitive critical wetlands habitat of this vital and internationally significant ecosystem.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has already documented many of the significant environmental impacts the road would produce in previous documents,
include the King Cove Access Project EIS from 2004, which analyzed transportation alternatives between King Cove and Cold Bay. The heart of Izembek Refuge contains two lagoons and the world's largest eelgrass beds. They attract hundreds of thousands of waterfowl, other migratory birds and marine mammals. The proposed road would bifurcate and fragment a narrow isthmus between the lagoons, which provide swan nesting grounds and the only migration path across the Refuge for caribou, brown bears and additional species. The road would cut though the ecological heart of the Refuge and irreparably harm this vital and critical wetlands complex.

This is a congressionally designated wilderness area, and this proposal threatens to set a dangerous precedent to other congressionally designated wilderness lands in addition to itself, as well as the National Wildlife Refuge System overall. The exchange lands simply aren't comparable, because the 43,000 acres proposed as wilderness have no eelgrass and limited waterfowl value, and they are not worth the risk to this ecosystem overall, the National Wilderness
Preservation System or to the National Wildlife Refuge System. The King Cove Corporation lands, which are on the east side of Cold Bay, are primarily uplands and provide no additional eelgrass or wetlands habitat to the Refuge, and those on the west side are already impacted by a road, and they do provide some waterfowl habitat but they do not attract nearly the level of waterfowl that come to the heart of the Refuge, the Izembek Lagoons complex.

I understand I have very little time left. To summarize my comments, we do not believe that the road would provide safer or more efficient travel to Cold Bay. We believe that, with all due respect to those who are concerned about their safety in King Cove, that the best alternative has already been accomplished. I understand that I need to end now and I will provide additional comments if there is additional time on what we believe should be included in the EIS. Thank you very much.

MS. CLOUGH: Thank you. Our next speaker is Pamela A. Miller.

MS. MILLER: Hello. My name is Pamela A. Miller.
I am a resident of Fairbanks, Alaska. Thank you for this opportunity to comment.

I wish to speak to the international importance of the Izembek Refuge. I understand from the scientific studies that Izembek Lagoon is increasingly being used for over-wintering grounds for the species, that some of the southern habitats, like in Mexico, and as you go north up the Pacific Coast. I have been to almost all those wintering grounds, in the lagoon in Mexico, in Padilla Bay, along up as you go north, and there's development threats in all those areas. And that's part of the cumulative impacts of this project that need to be addressed, is how important is this over-wintering habitat in a warming world and in an increasingly industrialized world.

Izembek Refuge was acknowledged a hundred years ago for its importance. Congress and the American people in ANILCA said this is a world-class area. We're going to give it our strongest emblem of protection, designated wilderness, in acknowledgement of these wildlife values.

I would like to speak to this proposed land
exchange violates the intent of ANILCA for land exchanges. It is well beyond the scope, the exchange is not addressing the primary purpose of the Refuge. And I'm concerned about the aspect of this exchange that the corridor will actually be taken completely out of federal management. You will have this snake of State lands through the Refuge. What's going to happen to the hunting management regime? It will turn into state lands with state subsistence management regulations, with state sport hunting authority, perhaps mining, oiling, gas, in that corridor. I don't know if that's been addressed by the congressional legislation, but I doubt it. And I believe those impacts on the corridor itself are really important to think about as you're fragmenting this landscape that's in the Refuge.

I also would like to address quickly that cumulative impacts to the Brant from proposed offshore leasing in the Bristol Bay, North Aleutians Basin, proposed lease sales, state leasing on lands, the potential for other impacts that could affect the quality of the habitat in the area. As far as -- I
have been to Cold Bay, I know it's remote. A lot of Alaska is remote. Most villages aren't connected by roads, they do have airports.

I recognize there's an issue related to health and safety. But as an Alaskan, I know that we don't have doctors that we need, we don't have the health care professional we need anywhere in the state. And I believe we need to address that issue, that's a bigger issue than this one local community. And so I do appreciate that we need better medical care through the Indian Health Service, through all of our health care, and I hope that together, Alaskans can work on that.

So, I thank you for this opportunity to comment.

MS. CLOUGH: Thank you. Our next speaker is Desiree Sorenson-Groves, of the National Wildlife Refuge Association.

MS. SORENSON-GROVES: Good afternoon. Thanks so much for allowing me to submit these comments. And can I just say, isn't it great that we live in a country where we can do this, and we can agree to disagree on issues, but we at least can talk to the decision makers and get this forward.
So I am Desiree Sorenson-Groves. I'm with the National Wildlife Refuge Association. I'm the Vice-President for Government Affairs, and I am submitting these comments on behalf of our 40,000 members, as well as 192 affiliate friends organizations that work on all national wildlife refuges throughout the system.

We appreciate that the Fish and Wildlife Service is forced to complete a new EIS following the legislation passed by Congress to evaluate the impacts of a road through the biological heart of the Izembek Refuge. However, we would first point out that this process itself is a waste of taxpayer dollars and valuable refuge system resources when the previous EIS was completed in 2003 found that a road would be devastating to the Refuge. Now while the 2003 EIS evaluated the road as a no-option alternative when determining which transportation tool would be the best to enable medical evacuations, the science presented just a few short years ago show the impacts from a road would be devastating.

This is a solution in search of a problem. In 1998, King Cove residents argued they lacked the
adequate access to medical and airport facilities, and in response they got 37 and a half million dollars for medical and airport improvements, and a state-of-the-art Hovercraft. We know that there've been at least 35 successful medivacs from King Cove to Cold Bay. In fact, Aleutians East Borough's officials agree, stating that the Hovercraft is, "a life-saving machine and is doing what it is supposed to do".

Congress already solved this problem, and further debate of this boondoggle, including this EIS, is a waste of time and taxpayer dollars at a time when our national resources are stretched too far as it is. Devastating impacts to wildlife, the construction of a road through this narrow isthmus would have devastating impacts to more than a half million Pacific Brant, Emperor Geese, swans, other wildlife, resulting in fragmentation disturbance, pollution, you guys have heard it all.

We believe this new EIS must address the impacts from the proposed road including road construction, sediment runoff, address the watershed impacts pollution, road avoidance, habitat fragmentation. It
must also address the current and projected impacts to the region from climate change, and the impacts that will be magnified by the development of road. The species that utilize the Izembek Refuge are already coping with the impacts from climate change, and the service must analyze how this other stressor, the road, will impact these wildlife already under siege.

With over 98 percent of the Pacific Black Brant population, as well as Stellar's Eiders, Tundra Swans dependent on the Refuge, specifically the eelgrass beds, which Brant gorge on before their non-stop journey to Mexico, the service must thoroughly analyze the impact to the eelgrass beds themselves.

As the Fish and Wildlife Service creates this EIS, they should evaluate the impact to refuges nationwide by de-designation of a wilderness for a land exchange. The road would be the first ever to bisect a congressionally designated wilderness, whereby definition, human's leave no mark, and is the highest level of protection that can be bestowed by the United States, and indeed, the world. The precedent opens the door for other wildernesses to be destroyed, not only
our national wildlife refuges but other federal lands,
national parks, forests, all throughout the system.

Further, the principles established in the
National Wildlife Refuge Improvement Act of 1997 would be reversed. This road would cost American taxpayers additional millions of dollars for building and maintenance costs, on top of the already appropriated 37 and a half million dollars. Cost estimates say that the additional 9 miles would be at least another 30 million dollars. This is a solution in search of a problem.

The people of King Cove have a fast, reliable Hovercraft for medical evacuations, bringing people from King Cove to Cold Bay in 20 minutes. A road would take more than two hours in good conditions. The wildlife values of the Izembek National Wildlife Refuge are globally significant and should not be compromised, and no more American taxpayer dollars should be spent on this boondoggle proposal. Thank you.

MS. CLOUGH: Are there any other people signed up to speak? Is there anyone else who would like to speak, whether you signed up or not? Okay, I know

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Nicole would like to. Why don't we take like a 10-minute break and then we'll come back and kind of do an open mike format and continue. That way people need to stretch their legs and enjoy the sun.

(Hearing recessed.)

(Hearing resumed.)

MR. CAMPBELL: Thank you. My name is McKie Campbell. I am the staff director for the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, Senator Lisa Murkowski, ranking member. I am here to testify on her behalf. I also bring to this testimony some degree of knowledge of NEPA and land trades.

For over a decade in Alaska I ran my own business where the main thing we did was project management of large scale EISs. One of those I served as a project manager for the draft EIS on the King Cove road -- Hovercraft issue. I have had the opportunity to spend quite a bit of time in Cold Bay, in Izembek, and walked to the proposed road numerous times and spent a lot of time out there in various seasons. I also, in my past life, have served as the Commissioner of the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, and bring some knowledge.
of fish and game values in the area. I was involved here in the Senate in the passage of Senate 111-11, which authorizes this land trade subject to the secretary's find of public purpose, and the environmental impact statement.

I am here to simply just tell you very simply that we strongly believe this is in the public purpose. Senator Murkowski advanced this legislation. We think that King Cove road is something that is long overdue. That the potential benefits to the environment, to fish, to wildlife, the land trade, of placing the very large acreage in refuge status far exceed the potential negative effects from authorizing the trade and the road corridor.

We also think this is an issue of social justice that is long overdue to the people of King Cove. The point you sometimes here is that, well, there are other communities around that have much worse access in Alaska. That's true, but I would tell you there is no community in the lower 48 states that would every put up with the situation of being cut off totally when a major airport was just a short distance away.
I will present much longer and more detailed comments for the record, but I don't think I am going to use even a portion of six minutes. But just emphasize strongly that in several decades of involvement in this, we come to this decision and what I am urging you, from considered opinion both on the effects of all the people of the region on the fish and on the wildlife. Thank you very much.

MS. CLOUGH: Thank you, sir. Was there anyone else who has not spoken previously that wanted to speak? On hearing, or seeing no hands, I know both Nicole Whittington-Evans and David Raskin wanted to make additional comments. So David, I'll call on you first, if that's okay.

UNIDENTIFIED: Age before beauty.

MS. CLOUGH: I'm not touching that one.

MR. RASKIN: Thank you very much. There are a few things that I would like to mention that perhaps have not been addressed as thoroughly as they should be. First I want to say, I have visited King Cove. I've inspected the whole road corridor. I've walked on the isthmus. I know that area, and I've even removed
invasive species on that Refuge, which are impacting
the Refuge.

Climate change. When we talk about climate change,
we need to talk in the EIS, not just about climate
change on Izembek, but climate change in the entire
region, because everything that happens on all the
other refuges and all the other public and private
lands that support these bird populations that migrate
through there and depend upon those, needs to be
addressed because it isn't just Izembek. Izembek is a
gathering place for so many, but they utilize all these
other areas, so every time you have an impact in any of
those areas, it's going to affect Izembek and vice-
versa, and this proposed road and its impacts need to
be considered in light of the broader region.

The same is true for the cumulative impacts of
this on other parts of that area. There was little
said about subsistence here, but the Association of
Village Council Presidents, which I think numbers 56 or
57 villages in western Alaska, has opposed in the past
this land exchange because it will impact their
subsistence, hunting. The geese and other waterfowl
that they hunt will depend upon Izembek and we need to consider, then those impacts.

We also need to consider the impacts of other kinds of development. There are many refuges and refuge areas that are likely to be impacted by potential oil development and other kinds of development, and again, this needs to be looked at on a region-wide basis in terms of all those important areas for birds and wildlife and subsistence. And so this EIA should address a broader area, looking at all of the resources, impacts, and potential uses by the same birds that use Izembek, the same animals that migrate through Izembek. And so we need a much broader view in terms of those cumulative and wider-range impacts.

Thank you.

MS. CLOUGH: Thank you. Nicole.

MS. WHITTINGTON-EVANS: This will just be a short summary of some of the issues we feel are important for the EIS to cover when you are all analyzing the proposed land exchange and road project. We will be submitting much more detailed comments later, and I do have a packet of information for you here that will
also help further outline some of these issues that we would like to see covered.

First is we need to make sure that impacts from the proposed road, including road construction, sediment runoff and watershed impacts, generally pollution, road avoidance and habitat fragmentation to wetlands, eelgrass and wildlife species, that these types of things are thoroughly addressed in the EIS. The current and projected impacts to the region from climate change, and how these impacts will be confounded by the development of a road, threats to eelgrass beds in general from the road and from climate change, impairment to threatened and endangered terrestrial and marine species as a result of this proposal, cumulative impacts including proposed oil and gas development in and around the lands and waters of the Izembek Refuge and lagoon, a cost-benefit analysis of the road that considers the funds already spent to improve transportation in the region from the King Cove Health and Safety Act, and includes a comparison analysis of the current transportation system, the Hovercraft.
This cost-benefit analysis is essential for determining whether or not the proposed Izembek project generates net public benefits and is therefore in the public interest. The cost-benefit analysis should be comprehensive, and include all federal monies already spent on this project, as well as addressing all market and non-market effects, including negative externalities of road construction, and benefits associated with road access.

Ecosystem services is another thing that should be addressed. Ecosystem services are a special class of non-market effects. They should be addressed in terms of their direct ecological contributions and their economic contribution to the no-action alternative, and in terms of the economic costs associated with their degradation.

A compatibility determination should also be undertaken, and impacts to subsistence resources. Thank you very much for this opportunity to comment, and for allowing me additional time. We feel strongly that a thorough analysis of the proposed road project and land exchange will show that this road is not in
the public's best interest.

MS. CLOUGH: Thank you. Is there anyone else that cares to speak? If not, we will remain around until four o'clock because that's how long the meeting was advertised, in case people come in late. If you would care to chat individually with anyone, those of you who are not familiar. Stanley Mack, go ahead.

MR. MACK: I have just a moment to respond to some of the comments that were made earlier, and one has to do with the road runoff and the impact on the Izembek eelgrass beds. One of the major concerns that I have is the protection of those eelgrass beds. I've lived off those lands all my life and I will not jeopardize anything that would impact the eelgrass beds. There are roads going directly to those eelgrass beds as we speak, and maintained by the Fish and Wildlife Service. So it isn't something that's new. This road will be two miles in each direction of both the Izembek and the Kinzarof Lagoon. I just want to bring that to your attention.

And yes, we have a Hovercraft that was given to us by the Federal Government, purchased by the
Federal Government, but it's again so costly to operate that we are going to have to evaluate that very seriously at this point in time. It's saved lives, but there's been times when the ones that we didn't save are not documented, and this road will save lives and afford an access that is so dearly needed for many, many years.

All my life I wanted to have this road to connect this community, King Cove, to Cold Bay. If I could just show you a picture of the cemetery in King Cove, those are the ones that didn't make it, not because of their age, but because of the access ability to that runway. Thank you.

MS. CLOUGH: Thank you. Anyone else? Well I thank you all very much for coming and for your comments, and we will certainly use them in our process. And again, we encourage you to comment additionally in writing, through our website, email or whatever method works for you. Thank you again.

(Hearing adjourned.)
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Natasha Kornilova
Notary Public in and for the District of Columbia

My commission expires:
April 14, 2012